

ILLCIUM PARVIFLORUM, CORRECT NAME
FOR THE ANISETREE OF THE FLORIDA NURSERY TRADE

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For many years a plant known as anisetree has been propagated and sold by Florida nurserymen under the Latin name of Illicium anisatum. This plant, however, did not match the technical description of I. anisatum L. A study was initiated in order to determine conclusively the correct species of this anisetree.

The anisetree, as cultivated in Florida, is used mainly as a hedge plant and occasionally as a specimen plant. It is a medium to large shrub or occasionally a small tree. It makes an excellent untrimmed or informally trimmed hedge. With good growing conditions it produces a dense growth of thick, medium green leaves which are fragrant when bruised. It grows rapidly with adequate water and fertilization, but will tolerate considerable neglect. It also tolerates a wide variety of soils, but does best on moist, fertile soils with adequate organic matter.

The anisetree of the Florida nursery trade keyed in different taxonomic keys (1, 2) to Illicium parviflorum Michx. ex Vent., one of our two native species, and not to the oriental I. anisatum, by which name it was called. I. parviflorum is native in a small area in the Ocala National Forest along the west side of Lake George from near Salt Springs southward and along the St. Johns River to about the southern end of the forest, with a few isolated locations elsewhere. It grows along stream banks in moist soil of high organic content. It is abundant in a few scattered sites but is generally absent in the intervening areas.

The following description of I. parviflorum essentially follows that of Smith (2): Large, spreading shrub to 7 m tall (sometimes to 13 m in cultivation), branchlets brown to grayish, slender, 2-4 mm diam; leaves irregularly alternate; petioles 1-1.5 mm diam, 8-16 mm long (to 25 mm in cultivation); leaf blades leathery, dull green to olivaceous (to glossy, medium green on vigorous specimens in open), narrowly elliptic to obovate-elliptic, 6-12 cm long, 2-5 cm broad (or larger in cultivation), acute at base, rounded to broadly obtuse or faintly emarginate at apex, margin narrowly revolute, midvein smooth above, prominent beneath, side veins usually 4-7 pairs, not prominent. Flowers axillary or subterminal, 1-3 together; subtending bracts several, papery, ovate-deltoid, rounded, 1-2 mm; pedicels 0.4-1 mm diam, 7-23 mm long with 2-5 scattered bracteoles like subtending bracts, 1-1.5 mm long; perianth segments 12-15, leathery, rounded, outer 1-1.5 x 1.5-3 mm, inner largest, 5.5-7 x 4.5-5.5 mm, orbicular or oblong-obovate, stamens 6-7 in one series, 2.5-3.5 mm long; carpels 11-13, 1.7-2.5 mm long; mature carpels 10-15 mm long, 5-6 mm broad, 2-5 mm thick, with short acumen; seed 1 per carpel, brown, glossy, 5-6 mm x 4-5 mm x 2-3 mm.

I. anisatum differs from I. parviflorum mainly in the flowers having more perianth segments (17-24) which are thinner, longer, and narrower (11-23 x 2-4.5 mm) and more stamens (17-25) in 2 series.

It was necessary to have known native material collected from the wild for comparison with the cultivated material in order to establish if the two were identical. A collecting trip was made to an area in the Ocala National Forest just southwest of Lake George where numerous plants were found along one of the streams. Flowering specimens were photographed (fig. 1) and collected for comparison. These plants proved identical with cultivated material, establishing that the cultivated anisetree is I. parviflorum, not I. anisatum.

A check of the literature revealed the probable source of the misidentification. William Bartram in his travels in Florida came across this plant before it was described as new and called it Illicium anisatum. Apparently the nurserymen have followed Bartram's naming, although it has long been known to be incorrect.

The correct name for the anisetree of the Florida nursery trade is Illicium parviflorum Michx. ex Vent. I. anisatum sensu Bartram, Journal 49. 1776; non L., is incorrectly applied to this plant and should not be used. I. anisatum L. is a distinct species from the orient and either is not grown here or is grown very sparingly.



Fig. 1. Illicium parviflorum in flower

Literature cited

1. Small, J. K. 1933. Manual of the southeastern flora. Univ. of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill. 1554 p.
2. Smith, A. C. 1947. The families Illiciaceae and Schisandraceae. Sargentia 7:1-224.